

REMARKS

Claims 1-3 are pending and at issue in the application with claims 1 and 3 being independent claims. Claims 1 and 3 have been amended. As a result, two independent claims remain in the application as previously paid for, and three total claims remain in the application as previously paid for. A charge of \$120.00 from Deposit Account No. 13-2855 is included herewith pursuant to 1.17(a)(1) to cover the surcharge for a one month extension of time. The applicants believe to additional fee is due. However, the commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any deficiency in the amount enclosed or any additional fees which may be required under 37 C.F.R. 1.16 or 1.17 to Deposit Account No. 13-2855. Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections in view of the remarks below is respectfully requested.

The official action begins with objections to the specification. The applicants respectfully submit that the above amendments overcome such objections and therefore requests withdrawal of the same. In particular, the applicants submit herewith a substitute specification, which is provided as a marked-up form and a clean form. The substitute specification includes amendments throughout the detailed description to refer to the drawings by figure and reference numeral. and an amended abstract. The substitute specification further includes a brief description of new Figures 1 and 2, amendments to renumber previous Figures 1-7 as Figures 3-9, amendments to the abstract, and amendments to correct editorial and typographical errors. The amendments to the claims are also reflected in the substitute specification. Accordingly, the applicants respectfully submit that the objections to the specification have been overcome. No new matter is added to the attached substitute specification. Support for the amendments to the specification may be found throughout the originally filed application, including paragraphs [0015]-[0076] and in previous Figures 1-7.

The official action also includes objections to the drawings. The applicants respectfully submit that the above amendments overcome such objections and therefore requests withdrawal of the same. In particular, new Figures 1 and 2 have been added to show every feature specified in the claims. Previous Figures 1-7 have been renumbered as Figures 3-9, and include reference numerals corresponding to the amended specification. Figures 3 and 7A include corrections to typographical and editorial errors, namely changing "Maschine

Interface" to "Machine Interface" in Figure 3 and changing "Post24BrokerProperties" to "Post24ServerProperties" in Figure 7A to correspond to the written description at paragraph [0060]. Accordingly, the applicants respectfully submit that the objections to the drawings have been overcome. No new matter has been added. Support for the amendments to the drawings may be found throughout the originally filed application, including paragraphs [0023]-[0030], [0034]-[0036] and [0046]-[0075] and including originally filed claims 1-3.

The applicants respectfully traverse the rejection of claim 3 as indefinite under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph. The applicants respectfully submit that amended claim 3 overcomes any indefiniteness rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, and therefore request reconsideration and withdrawal of the same. Amended claim 3 has been rewritten in independent form and no longer refers to claim 1. The applicants submit that the "several electronic parcel box systems networked with each other" properly introduces the element and therefore does not require prior antecedent basis. Amended claim 3 further removes reference to "the device". Accordingly, the applicants submit that claim 3 complies with the written description requirement under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph.

Turning to the claim rejections, the applicants respectfully traverse the rejections of claims 1-3 as unpatentable over Katuta (U.S. Patent No. 6,456,900). The applicants submit that claims 1-3 are not rendered obvious by Katuta. The action does not establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness because the action has not met its initial burden of factually supporting its *prima facie* conclusion of obviousness, and Katuta fails to disclose all of the limitations of amended claims 1-3.

The action does not establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness because the action does not factually support its *prima facie* conclusion of obviousness. Although the action asserts that Katuta discloses a "control unit 110 for controlling the operating unit 120, the control unit 110 comprising an interface 111-113 for flexibly associating the parcel boxes with the operating units," the action does not cite any specific portion of Katuta which discloses this feature. Instead, the action cites virtually all of the detailed description (Column 7, lines 45+) of Katuta without referencing any specific feature within the detailed description which discloses the above limitation. As a result, the action has not provided any factual support that Katuta discloses a "a control unit for controlling the operating unit, the control unit comprising an interface for flexibly associating the parcel boxes with the

operating units.” Instead, the action effectively provides an omnibus rejection of the claims. To establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness, the prior art reference must teach or suggest all the claim limitations, and the action must factually supports any *prima facie* conclusion of obviousness. See MPEP 2142; See also MPEP 707.07(d).

In addition, Katuta fails to disclose all of the limitations of amended claims 1-3. In particular, Katuta does not disclose or suggest several of a plurality of parcel boxes associated with one of at least two operating units and a central control unit that flexibly associates the parcel boxes with the operating units, as recited by independent claims 1 and 3. Instead, the system of Kakuta is rigid in associating parcel boxes with operating units because each embodiment of Kakuta provides only one operating unit which controls all parcel boxes, such that all parcel boxes are always associated with the same operating unit. For example, only the door controlling unit 120 of Kakuta is associated with all of the lockers 101. (See Fig. 1, column 6, lines 50-67). In a further example, an operating unit 222 of Kakuta controls all of the lockers 221 and locker equipment 220 using various equipment, such as a displaying part 224, a code reading part 225, a code interpreting part 226, a locker controlling part 223, a distribution accepting part 227, a notification controlling part 212, etc. (See Fig. 9, column 15, lines 42-60). Multiple operating units are not provided. In other embodiments, the operating unit of Katuta is not associated with any lockers at all. For example, the automatic ticket vending machine shown in Fig. 13 of Katuta includes a settling processing part 252, a touch panel 261, a money accepting part 262, a ticket issuing part 263 and a sales management part 264, which control the printing and selling of tickets, but which are not connected to lockers. (See Fig. 13, column 20, line 63 to column 21, line 41). As a result, any control unit disclosed in Kakuta does not *flexibly* associate parcel boxes with multiple operating units because all the parcel boxes are always associated with the same operating unit, and in other cases Kakuta provides no parcel boxes.

Accordingly, Katuta does not disclose or even suggest several of a plurality of parcel boxes are associated with one of at least two operating units and a central control unit that flexibly associates the parcel boxes with the operating units, as recited by claims 1-3. It is clear that a *prima facie* case of obviousness cannot be maintained where all the limitations of a claimed combination are not taught or suggested by the prior art. See *In re Royka*, 490 F.2d 981, 180 USPQ 580 (CCPA 1974). See also MPEP 2143.03.

In addition to not disclosing each and every element of the claims, Katuta does not disclose the advantages and benefits associated with the claims. In particular, flexibly associating parcel boxes with operating units allows the central control unit to carry out a changeable allocation of parcel boxes to a different operating unit if one operating unit fails. In a further advantage, the flexible allocation allows different operating terminals to be provided for different logistical partners. Still further, in addition to a postal service provider that operates a parcel box system, additional logistic partners can be given access to parcel boxes of the logistic system, including the loading of the parcel boxes, in which case it can be provided that the logistic partners use different dialog terminals other than the operator of the system. Because the allocation of the parcel boxes to the operating units is made by the central control unit, the allocation can be easily adapted to the momentary situation of the operation of a parcel box system. If a logistics operator needs several parcel boxes of a certain parcel box system, these can be combined and allocated to the operating unit for logistics operators. If the selection of the parcel boxes changes, the allocation can be changed centrally. If, for example, no more parcel boxes are given to external logistics operators, then all of the parcel boxes are allocated to the operating units of the operating postal service provider. Another advantage of the flexible allocation is, for example, that a parcel box system can be used as an automated vending machine and as a system for delivering shipments. For example, a certain number of parcel boxes can be filled with goods that can be purchased by a customer at the system. Here, the parcel boxes filled with goods can be allocated to a different operating unit than the parcel boxes used for depositing parcel shipments. While Katuta provides a locker delivery system and automated ticket vending machine, Katuta only provides one operating unit for all lockers or compartments, if any are provided, such that all lockers or compartments are always associated with the same operating unit.

Because Katuta does not disclose or suggest a central control unit that flexibly associates several of a plurality of parcel boxes with one of at least two operating units, Katuta does not provide or suggest any of the advantages obtained by the systems of claims 1-3, and therefore does not render any of the claims obvious.

The applicants respectfully traverse the rejections of claims 1 as anticipated by over Stevens et al. (WO 01/00069 A2). The applicants further traverse the rejections of claims 2

and 3 as obvious over Stevens et al. either alone or in view of Katuta. The action does not establish a *prima facie* case of anticipation or obviousness because the action has not properly interpreted the claims with respect to Steven et al., and both Steven et al. and Katuta fail to disclose all of the limitations of independent claims 1 and 3.

The action does not establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness because the action has not properly interpreted the claims. In particular, the action has utilized an unreasonably broad interpretation of the term "electronic parcel box". The interpretation of a package 50 as a parcel box is well beyond the broadest reasonable interpretation of the claims consistent with the applicants' specification and consistent with the interpretation of those of ordinary skill in the art. Simply put, a package (e.g., mail) is not an electronic parcel box. Instead, the packages 50 of Stevens et al. are merely contents of a postal storage box, 10, and one of ordinary skill in the art would not consider mail to be an electronic parcel box. See MPEP 2111.

In addition, Stevens et al. fails to disclose all of the limitations of amended claims 1-3. As with Katuta above, Stevens et al. does not disclose or suggest several of a plurality of parcel boxes associated with one of at least two operating units and a central control unit that flexibly associates the parcel boxes with the operating units, as recited by independent claims 1 and 3. Instead, the system of Stevens et al. is rigid in that packages 50 are always associated with the same compartment 10 once placed in the compartment 10, and the control circuitry provided by a processor unit 22 is only associated with a particular compartment 10. Therefore, to the extent that the processor unit 22 associates packages 50 with a compartment 10, the processor unit 22 is only capable of associating packages with one compartment 10, and is incapable of flexibly associating packages 50 with multiple compartments 10. Further, contrary to the assertion of the official action, the barcode 52 does not associate the package 50 with the compartment 10. Instead, the bar code 52 only encodes details and postal charges of the package 50. (See page 13, second full paragraph).

Accordingly, Stevens et al. does not disclose or even suggest several of a plurality of parcel boxes are associated with one of at least two operating units and a central control unit that flexibly associates the parcel boxes with the operating units, as recited by claims 1-3. Consequently, Stevens et al. does not provide or suggest any of the advantages obtained by the systems of claims 1-3, and therefore does not render any of the claims obvious. Likewise,

Appl. No. 10/821,107
Amdt. dated July 7, 2006
Reply to official action of March 7, 2006

Katuta does not make up for the deficiencies of Stevens et al., as explained above. Therefore, neither Stevens et al. or Katuta., either alone or in combination, renders any of claims 1-3 obvious.

Accordingly, the applicants respectfully submit that claims 1-3 are novel and non-obvious in view of the cited references and should be allowed. In light of the foregoing, the prompt issuance of a notice of allowance is respectfully solicited. Should the examiner have any questions, the examiner is respectfully invited to telephone the undersigned

Respectfully submitted,

MARSHALL, GERSTEIN & BORUN LLP
233 S. Wacker Drive
6300 Sears Tower
Chicago, Illinois 60606-6357
(312) 474-6300

By: _____

Aaron M. Peters
Registration No.: 48,801
Attorney for Applicants

July 7, 2006

Amendments to the Drawings:

The attached sheet of drawings includes changes to Figures 1-7. These sheets, which include Figures 1-9, replace the previous sheets including Figures 1-7. Figures 1 and 2 have been added. Previous Figures 1-7 have been renumbered as Figures 3-9. In new Figures 3-9, the previously omitted reference numerals have been added. In new Figures 3 and 7A, typographical and editorial errors have been corrected to correspond with the specification. Support for the requested changes may be found throughout the specification and claims as originally filed. No new matter has been added.

Attachment: Replacement Sheets

PACKET BOX ELECTRONIC DEVICE AND LOGISTIC SYSTEM

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This is a continuation of International Application No. PCT/DE02/03761 filed October 7, 2002, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

Field of the Disclosure

[0002] The disclosure generally relates to an electronic parcel box system.

Brief Description of Related Technology

[0003] Electronic parcel box systems are known, for example, from DE 100 00 830 A1, which discloses a method for depositing goods into at least one locker. The parcel box system used for this method has several parcel boxes that are opened and closed by means of an electronic locking system. Several parcel boxes are associated with an operating unit in the form of a terminal for reading in or outputting data. The locking system and the operating units are connected to a computer that controls the parcel box system. This publication also discloses a networking of the computers of several locker systems to form a multi-computer system having a central administration computer. The administration computer belongs, for example, to a delivery service that monitors all movements of goods in the locker compartments.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0004] Disclosed herein is an electronic parcel box system that allows flexible delivery and pick-up of parcels from parcel box systems.

[0005] Accordingly, such an electronic parcel box system is configured in such a way that it includes a plurality of electronic parcel boxes, whereby in each case, several parcel boxes are associated with an operating unit, and a central control unit is provided for

controlling the operating units, whereby the central control unit has a means for flexibly associating the parcel boxes with the operating units.

[0006] The electronic parcel box system includes several individual delivery devices, whereby the delivery devices are equipped with one or more operating units. Several or all of the operating units are controlled by the central control unit.

[0007] It is advantageous for the operating units to include a control means for controlling the opening and/or the closing of the parcel boxes associated with the operating units.

[0008] The individual electronic parcel box systems are joined together to form clusters. In particular, it is advantageous for the central control unit to have a means for associating the parcel box systems with the operating units. The embodiment in which the parcel boxes and the operating units are associated with each other via the central control unit has the advantage that, in this manner, the electronic parcel box system can easily be adapted to changed operating parameters. It also is advantageous for the association of the parcel boxes with the operating units to be variable. In this manner, it is possible, for example, that, if an operating unit malfunctions, parcel boxes that had been associated with this operating unit until then can be associated with another operating unit.

[0009] In an especially preferred embodiment, the electronic parcel box system is configured in such a way that the central control unit has an interface for receiving information from a database server that contains filling data. In this way, the electronic parcel box system can be flexibly adapted to operating situations and user habits. For example, if an operating unit malfunctions, the parcel boxes that had been associated with this operating unit until then can be associated with one or more other operating units. This, too, enhances the flexibility to adapt to the needs or habits of users of the parcel box system.

[0010] Especially preferred embodiments allow internal communication between the central control unit and the operating units as well as external communication between the central control unit and one or more database servers. In an advantageous embodiment, such an integration of the data communication takes place in such a way that the central control unit has an interface for transmitting information to a database server that has been provided with filling data. Moreover, it is advantageous to equip the central control unit with additional interfaces for checking and/or changing operating states. This makes the electronic parcel box system particularly easy to maintain. Another enhancement in the flexibility and versatility of the electronic parcel box system can be achieved in that the central control unit has a computer that can store and process operating data and/or the filling status of the parcel boxes.

[0011] The term "computer" is not to be construed in any limiting manner, as it refers to any unit that is capable of executing computations, for example, a work station, a personal computer, a microcomputer or a circuit that is suitable for executing computations and/or comparisons.

[0012] Also disclosed herein is a logistic system that is characterized in that it contains several electronic parcel box systems networked with each other. Such a logistic system constitutes an especially preferred way to allow a flexible delivery and pick-up of parcels from parcel boxes. By networking several electronic parcel box systems, it is especially possible to deliver mailpieces in a particularly flexible manner. Thus, for example, if all of the parcel boxes of a given electronic parcel box system are occupied, it is possible to transport additional mailpieces to another electronic parcel box system and to keep them ready for pick-up there. By integrating a preferably centrally-operated database server, parcel shipments can be delivered to the electronic parcel box systems as a function of the filling status of the electronic parcel box system and/or of the parcel boxes contained therein.

[0013] Additional features of the disclosure may become apparent to those skilled in the art from a review of the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the drawing figures, the examples, and the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] For a more complete understanding of the disclosure, reference should be made to the following detailed description and accompanying drawing wherein:

[0014.1] Figure 1 illustrates an example of an electronic parcel box system;

[0014.2] Figure 2 illustrates an example of a logic system that includes several electronic parcel box systems;

[0015] Figure 3 [[1]] illustrates the structure of a delivery machine interface suitable as a communication platform with the electronic parcel box system;

[0016] Figure 4 [[2]] is a schematic diagram of components used for user registration, user assistance, and shipment tracking;

[0017] Figure 5 [[3]] is a schematic diagram of function procedure calls for the implementation of in-house service functions;

[0018] Figure 6 [[4]] is a schematic diagram of interfaces employed for user notification;

[0019] Figures 7, 7A, 7B and 7C are [[5]] a detailed view of interfaces used for the filling and administration of parcel boxes;

[0020] Figure 8 [[6]] is a detailed view of interfaces used for the configuration of delivery machines and the capacity utilization; and,

[0021] Figure 9 [[7]] shows process steps for correcting errors.

[0022] While the disclosed device and system are susceptible of embodiments in various forms, there are illustrated in the drawings (and will hereafter be described) specific embodiments of the disclosure, with the understanding that the disclosure is intended to be illustrative, and is not intended to limit the disclosure to the specific embodiments described and illustrated herein

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0023] Referring generally to Figures 1 and 2, disclosed Disclosed herein is an electronic parcel box system 10 that includes [[an]] operating units 12a, 12b, a plurality of electronic parcel boxes 14a-14f, several of which are associated with the operating unit 12a, 12b, and [[.]] a central control unit 16 for controlling the operating units 12a, 12b. The control unit 16 includes an interface 18 for flexibly associating the parcel boxes 14a-14f with the operating units 12a, 12b. The parcel boxes 14a-14f associated with a malfunctioning operating unit can be associated with another operating unit. Also disclosed herein is a logic system 100 that includes several electronic parcel box systems 10a, 10b, 10c networked with each other, a central database server 102 that includes memory 104 for storing data about the filling status of the parcel box systems 10a, 10b, 10c and a transmitter 106 for transmitting the data, and a device for delivering postal parcels to individual electronic parcel box systems 10a, 10b, 10c as a function of the filling status of the electronic parcel box systems 10a, 10b, 10c.

[0024] The embodiment presented below shows the integration of the electronic parcel box system 10 into a comprehensive logistic system 100. Such an integration of the electronic parcel box system 10 into a comprehensive system is especially advantageous since in such a case, the flexibility attained with the set-up of the electronic parcel box systems 10a, 10b, 10c according to the disclosure allows them to be used especially efficiently.

[0025] Although such a use of the parcel box systems 10a, 10b, 10c in the comprehensive logistic system 100 is especially preferred, as a matter of principle, the electronic parcel box systems 10a, 10b, 10c can also be operated without being networked. In these embodiments as well, the integration of the central control unit 16 for controlling the operating units 12a, 12b makes the electronic parcel box systems 10a, 10b, 10c more flexible to use. However, the application possibilities for the disclosed system are even further augmented by networking multiple parcel box systems 10a, 10b, 10c with each other and/or

with the preferably centrally operated database server 102. When several of these advantageous components are integrated, the result is a comprehensive system having the following constituents, which are also referred to below as postal service customers (e.g., "Post24") since it is possible to achieve automated, round-the-clock operation:

[0026] 1. Multiple parcel dispensing units that preferably each have at least one operating unit 12a, 12b.

[0027] 2. A central control unit 16 with which the individual delivery machines are networked in clusters and which monitors the operating states and functions of the delivery machines. The central control unit 12 serves as a "concentrator" for the parcel transactions that it forwards to the server of the postal service customers. Moreover, the central control unit 12 distributes the operating instructions of the server of the postal service customers to the parcel delivery machines.

[0028] 3. The server 102 of the postal service customers that administers the customer and parcel data and that registers and controls the procedures of the delivery machine and that operates the central program applications (registration, CallCenter, Track&Trace, etc.).

[0029] The system has a modular design. A standardized interface is defined that regulates the communication between the delivery machine, or the CallCenter, and the server of the postal service customers. In this manner, delivery machines made by different manufacturers can be incorporated. The modular design of the individual parcel box systems 10 is especially well-suited in terms of increasing the flexibility and versatility of the individual electronic parcel box systems 10 as well as of the comprehensive logistic system 100. Preferably, the electronic parcel box systems 10 used in the logistic system 100 are structured in such a way that they execute the functions and operating contents of the comprehensive logistic system 100 in an especially effective and efficient manner.

[0030] As a matter of principle, the electronic parcel box systems 10 can be implemented in the form of numerous different technical solutions. The embodiments of electronic parcel box systems 10 presented below, however, are particularly well-suited in view of their reliability and user-friendliness. One of the two systems is characterized in that the parcel boxes 14a-14f can each be individually closed with a door. Another, likewise preferred, configuration of the embodiment of the parcel box system 10 is characterized by a cyclic elevator system with special transport mechanisms for individual boxes for purposes depositing and removing the individual parcels.

[0031] In the embodiments shown, the delivery machine allows loading and picking-up of parcels or of contents via differently sized parcel boxes. An especially preferred feature of the delivery machine system is that parcel boxes are only temporarily associated with

certain recipients, namely, only when the box contains something for that specific recipient. For this purpose, first of all, the potential recipient should be known to the delivery machine system and secondly, the shipments should be administered centrally and so as to be recipient-related.

[0032] During the loading procedure, a parcel identification code and a recipient identification code are detected. On the basis of the recipient identification code, the matching access code is requested from the server of the postal service customers (central system). When the parcel is picked up, the person doing so identifies himself with his personal recipient identification code, for example, using a magnetic card and the secret personal access code. If this information matches the information stored in the delivery machine, the contents of a box are released to the recipient. If it is a cash-on-delivery ("COD") parcel or if a sum of money has to be collected when the parcel is handed over, then the amount is first displayed and the person picking it up can pay this amount via a payment terminal (e.g., a credit card, cash card, etc.).

[0033] Parcels (or goods) that are being returned by recipients are detected by the delivery machine and reported to the server of the postal service customers, which initiates the pick-up procedure by the appropriate logistics personnel.

[0034] Advantageously, the central control unit 16 – which is also called a control panel – has the properties described below.

[0035] The individual delivery machines are networked via the central control unit 16 that clusters and combines the communication ("concentrator"). Service and maintenance tasks are monitored via the central control unit 16. The central control unit 16 recognizes whether delivery machines or components of the delivery machine (operating unit, printer, individual boxes) are ready for operation and which operating events are taking place in the various delivery machines.

[0036] The server of the postal service customers is a data server that is networked via Internet-based web technology with the delivery machines, or with the control panel 16. The server of the postal service customers is an interface to additional database applications, which, for example, allow an integration of invoicing and shipment tracking functions.

[0037] The delivery machine is preferably only used by recipients who have previously signed up with the postal service entity (e.g., Deutsche Post) for this service and whose data is stored on the server of the postal service customers. The recipients who are thus registered receive a recipient identification code that they are supposed to use as part of their address information and they also receive a personal secret access code. Once a delivery has been made to the delivery machine, the recipient is automatically notified by the server of the postal service customers. The notification is preferably given electronically, for

example, by sending an SMS message or an e-mail message. However, it is likewise possible for a letter to be automatically printed and sent to the recipient. The recipient can then pick up the parcel at the delivery machine at his own convenience. If this is not done within a certain period of time, a reminder is sent and, once the delivery period has lapsed, the parcel is made ready to be returned to the sender.

[0038] The parcel pick-up system is suitable for various areas of application. On the one hand, this delivery machine system can deliver normal parcels for final customers, but on the other hand, it can also meet special requirements of business customers.

[0039] Thus, a fixed or variable portion of the delivery machine parcel boxes can be rented for business partners and customers of the logistic company employing the system so that these customers can use the system accordingly. The delivery machine system is thus a central depot for these customers and the stock of goods and movement of goods in this depot can be controlled centrally and invoiced accordingly. In particular, this is a system consisting of centralized and decentralized components in order to achieve an intelligent, demand-based ordering and delivery system. The system comprises various components and interfaces that effectively and flexibly achieve a logistic system with delivery and service capabilities that have not been possible up until now.

[0040] Examples of functions that are integrated into the system are: parcel data management; user data management; registration of customers; B2B partner management; tracking of packages; management of the delivery machine configuration; capacity planning; notification; statistical data evaluation; delivery machine interface; and, in-house service.

[0041] It is advantageous to make a distinction between basic management components and the access to the parcel data and user data as well as to secondary components that map the business processes **[4]**into the system.

[0042] The modular structure of the system allows an independent incremental development of the various services.

[0043] Since an especially preferred embodiment of the system and its components is based on an implementation of EJBs (Enterprise JavaBeans) technology, the basic components are mapped onto parcel EJBs and User EJBs. All other components communicate with these EJBs when they have to request or change parcel and customer data. The secondary components are, in part, complex partial systems that are made up of classes, EJBs and graphical user interfaces (GUIs). In order to allow communication of the components that is independent of the component design, each component provides a binding interface to its services in the form of a facade object – or EJB. The interfaces of the various components are described below.

[0044] Delivery machine interface:

[0045] The delivery machine interface is the communication platform with the delivery machines. The interface receives requests from the delivery machine and forwards them to the pertinent components. If the delivery machine expects data in response to its request, then this data are returned to the interface by the components and subsequently forwarded to the delivery machine.

[0046] Figure 3 ~~[[1]]~~ shows the structure 200 of the components. An XML parser 202 carries out the mapping of the XML files that are sent per http post into the function procedure calls that can be interpreted by the logistic system 100 of the Machine Interface class, evaluates the function procedure calls 204, and forwards them to the pertinent components, namely, User 206, Parcel 208, DeliveryMachine 210, and Notification 212.

[0047] Referring to Figure 4, the ~~[[The]]~~ components User Registration, B2B Partner Management, and Parcel Tracking are preferably encapsulated in a CallCenter façade 214. The façade 214 takes over the communication with the EJBs for user and parcel data management, that is to say, User 206 and Parcel 208. The component makes available web-based GUIs for registering and parcel tracking. These are encoded in JSP 216. Actions by the users are translated by means of a Worker Bean 218 into function procedure calls and forwarded to the CallCenter façade 214. Preferably, it is the CallCenter façade 214 that only now takes over the execution of the business logic circuit. The graph presented below provides a rough overview of this scenario.

[0048] Referring to Figure 5, the ~~[[The]]~~ In-House Services component 220 encapsulates the services provided by the logistic system 100 for the in-house service into the delivery bases. At the interface to the employees of the in-house service, there is a JSP 222 that implements the GUI. Actions by the in-house employees are translated by means of a Worker Bean 224 into function procedure calls and forwarded to the In-House Service façade 220. The In-House Service façade 220 thus forms the interface to the actual function logic circuit of the component. The In-House Service façade 220 also constitutes the communication interface to the other components of the system. In order to map the required function logic circuit, the component needs access to the basic components, namely, User 206 and DeliveryMachine 210.

[0049] The structure of the component is disclosed in ~~the drawing figures~~ Figure 5.

[0050] Another component that, thanks to the modular structure of the logistic system 100, can be installed without any problems and that advantageously improves the logistic system 100 and the components used therein, especially the parcel box system 10, is a notification component. The notification component effectuates the sending of messages to the user of the logistic system. The component preferably has two tasks. It maps the

notification regimen of the logistic partners and takes over the technical transmission of messages to the devices of the customers.

[0051] Referring to Figure 5, the ~~[[The]]~~interface to the other components of the system is implemented by a facade class called NotificationFacade 226. This class provides numerous methods that serve to inform the component about events that can trigger a notification being sent to a user. At the present time, such events are triggered by the interface component as the result of an action at the delivery machine and of the registration component. In order to be able to configure the target and the content pertaining to the message, the component needs to have access to address data of the message recipient. All of the message recipients managed in this especially preferred embodiment of the logistic system 100 should thus make available the Notifiable interface 228. These are, for example, the EJBs of a postal service provider (referred to herein as "LogisticPartners") 230, the EJBs of customers of the postal service ~~previers~~ providers (referred to herein as "LogisticPartnerClient") 232, and the EJBs of User.

[0052] The organization of the user and parcel data can be carried out in many different ways. A user and parcel management system in the form of an object-oriented model (object model) that can be implemented especially advantageously will be presented below.

[0053] The central object of the object model for the user management is the EntityBean UserEJB 206, which stores all data on persons who are permitted to operate the delivery machine. Final customers as well as deliverers and service personnel are classified as users. A complex object model (person as basic class, derived classes for the various roles of the person) was dispensed with.

[0054] This yields the preferred embodiment, namely, to place the role of the user into the object as an attribute. The role is defined as "int." In the Const class, expressive variable names are defined, for example:

```
public class Const {  
    ...  
    static final int ROLE_DPAG_RECIPIENT = 1;  
    ...  
}
```

[0055] Moreover, the user object should have a reference to the associated LogisticPartners 230 or LogisticPartnerClient 232. LogisticPartners 230 are, for example, the postal service provider that operates the logistic system, or other companies that are given access to components of the logistic system, including the loading of the parcel boxes. LogisticPartnerClients 232 are the customers of a LogisticPartner 230, that is to say, for example, Telekom as a customer of Danzas.

[0056] Depending on the role of the user, the object receives a reference to a LogisticPartner (ROLE_B2B_DELIVERY_AGENT) or to a LogisticPartnerClient (ROLE_B2B_RECIPIENT). In each case, the other reference remains empty (It is never permissible for both references to be filled in at the same time since a person is either delivering or picking up a shipment, never both).

[0057] Referring to Figures 7 and 7A, a [[The]]UserGroupEJB object 236 (likewise an EntityBean) allows the combination of several users into one group. In addition to a list of users, the UserGroup 236 has a reference to the LogisticPartner 230 or to the LogisticPartnerClient 232 to which all members of the groups belong. The redundant storage of the reference in the User 234 as well as in the UserGroup 236 simplifies the access to information in the LogisticPartner(Client) 230, 232.

[0058] Referring to Figures 7 and 7B, since ~~Since~~ parcels can be sent to both types (User 234 and UserGroup 236), the two objects implement the Interface Addressable 238. The interface 238 has the following methods: getUsers(), getID() and getExpiryMinutes(). This ensures that parcels that are sent to an addressable can be processed by the server.

[0059] The getUsers() method yields a list of user EJBs. If it is a UserGroup 236, this list contains several EJBs, and if it is a User 234, only one EJB is present.

[0060] The getID() method returns the ID of the User 234 or of the UserGroup 236. Since the addressable has to be able to be permanently stored, the subordinate object can be found through this ID. This results in the request that the IDs for the User 234 and UserGroup 236 be taken from a set of numbers. Moreover, referring again to Figure 7A, in the object Post24ServerProperties 240, there is the newUserID() method. It returns an unambiguous continuous ID. Internally, this method accesses a database application, especially an Oracle sequence.

[0061] Referring back to Figure 7B, the [[The]]getExpiryMinutes() method in the addressable 238 is needed in order to determine the ExpiryDate of the parcel. The permitted retention time of a parcel depends on the client. In order to calculate the ExpiryDate, the getExpiryMinutes() method in both objects User 234 and UserGroup 236 accesses the LogisticPartnerClient.getExpiryMinutes() method and adds this permissible retention time to the current point in time.

[0062] The User 234 and the UserGroup 236 are created by the registration or by the administration tool.

[0063] Referring to Figures 7 and 7C, the [[The]]EntityBean Parcel 242 is provided in order to manage the parcels. The ParcelID is issued by the delivery machine and the server is notified via the interface with notifyDelivery(). Then the delivery machine facade creates a new Parcel Object with the ParcelID as the Primary Key.

[0064] The recipient (transmitted in the form of a customer number) is stored as addressable. In addition to the recipient, there is the substitute attribute, likewise of the addressable type. It cannot be set at notifyDelivery() but rather at a later point in time by calling the substituteBy method (addressable Addressable). The substitute arrangement is mapped by means of this attribute. The Parcel Object offers the following methods: getRecipients() and getSubstitutes(), each of which returns a list of User Objects.

[0065] In generating a new Parcel Object, for example, by means of the notifyDelivery() delivery machine interface, the ExpiryDate is calculated using the above-mentioned method and the notification is made to the Parcel Object. Thus, the create method contains the ExpiryDate. Each LogisticPartner can have different calculation rules for the ExpiryDate.

[0066] In the case of COD parcels, a COD object 244 is dispensed, while packages and parcels without COD are generated by a create method without COD. In the case of parcels, the IdentCode of the parcel is transferred in the create method. In addition, the Parcel Object is informed about which LogisticPartner 230 it belongs to. This information is necessary for the capacity planning.

[0067] The history is maintained by the database using a trigger that transmits the old data record to an archive table before changing a data record. The getHistory() method provides a listing of the status of all archive entries.

[0068] The delivery machine configuration and the capacity management are preferably likewise integrated into the logistic system 100 as modular components.

[0069] The delivery machines of the postal service customers system make available a fixed number of boxes of different sizes for storage. The boxes are used by different logistic companies. Referring back to Figure 7B, since ~~[[Since]]~~ the allocation of the delivery machine boxes among the logistic companies should be known for purposes of the parcel handling as well as for the cost calculation, delivery machine configurations are administered in an EJB DeliveryMachine 246. The EJB allows the setting and querying of the box configurations of each delivery machine as well as the calculation of the current and future filling with parcels.

[0070] Referring to Figures 7C and 8, the ~~[[The]]~~ actual box configuration, that is to say, the number of boxes rented by a logistic partner broken down by box size, is represented by two EJBs BoxTypeQuantity 248 ~~BoxTypeAssignment~~ and BoxType 250. The DeliveryMachine 246 allocates each logistic partner a certain amount of BoxTypeQuantity 248 ~~BoxTypeAssignment~~ EJBs, namely, one for each rented box size. Each BoxTypeQuantity 248 ~~BoxTypeAssignment~~ stores the type and number of rented boxes. The box size is stored in its own EJB with the name BoxType 250.

[0071] Due to the modular structure of the parcel box system 10 used as well as of the logistic system 100, additional components can be integrated at any point in time. For example, it is possible to provide additional components for evaluation functions. Examples of such a data evaluation functionality are evaluations of the parcel data and customer data for statistical purposes.

[0072] Referring to Figure 9, protocolling ~~Protocolling~~-(logging) is advantageous, especially for checking the proper functioning. The logging classes provided by the application server are used to log errors that have occurred. These are encapsulated for greater usefulness.

[0073] For example, the class `de.Post24.util.P24Log` provides a statistical logging method:

```
public static void log    (int severity,  
                           java.lang.String system,  
                           Java.lang.String msg,  
                           java.lang.Throwable t)
```

[0074] The meanings here are:

severity	severity of the error. Four error classes are distinguished, which can be called up via constants within the P24Log class: P24Log.debug, P24Log.info, P24Log.warning, P24Log.error
system	name of the partial system
msg	error text to be stored
t	exception

[0075] Simpler "lean" versions of this method are likewise possible, preferably by replacing certain parameters by predefined values, for example:

severity	P24Log.debug
system	name of the partial system
t	not applicable

[0076] Using the techniques shown, an adaptation of the configuration parameters can be done quickly and reliably.

[0077] The person skilled in the art can replace embodiments used in this presentation by substituting functionalities of other programming languages and program functions.

[0078] In the preferred programming language java, it is also possible to use other functionalities than the ones mentioned. In particular, it is advantageous for the person skilled in the art to use the process steps known from the other documents, such as, for example, <http://java.sun.com/docs/codeconv/> (Java Coding Conventions), for the implementation of additional functions and for modifying and improving the functions employed.

[0079] The foregoing description is given for clearness of understanding only, and no unnecessary limitations should be understood therefrom, as modifications within the scope of the disclosure may be apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art.

What is Claimed is:

1. An electronic parcel box system comprising:
 - (a) at least two [[an]]operating units;
 - (b) a plurality of electronic parcel boxes, several of which are associated with one of the operating units; and[[.]]
 - (c) a central control unit for controlling the operating units, the central control unit comprising an interface for flexibly associating the parcel boxes with the operating units.
2. The electronic parcel box system of claim 1, wherein the parcel boxes associated with a malfunctioning operating unit are associated with another operating unit.
3. A logistic system comprising:
 - (a) several electronic parcel box systems networked with each other according to claim 1, each electronic parcel box system comprising:
at least two operating units;
a plurality of electronic parcel boxes, several of which are associated with one of the operating units; and
a central control unit for controlling the operating units, the central control unit comprising an interface for flexibly associating the parcel boxes with the operating units;
 - (b) a central database server comprising memory for storing data about the filling status of the parcel box systems and a transmitter for transmitting the data[[; and]],
 - (c) ~~a device for delivering wherein~~ postal parcels are delivered to individual electronic parcel box systems as a function of the filling status of the electronic parcel box systems.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0080] ~~Disclosed herein is a method for packet box electronic device and a logistic system. The A~~ device and system include a plurality of electronic boxes for packets, several electronic boxes being assigned to a control unit and a central control unit for monitoring the control units.